

Writing and Drawing in the Margins

Teacher Reference

What is it?

Competent readers will regularly write and or draw in the margins of a text. When readers engage in this active reading strategy, they are clarifying, summarizing, and visualizing ideas presented in the text. I see a difference between “annotating the text” and writing and drawing in the margins. The term “annotating” has come to mean many different things—writing notes in the margins, underlining information, highlighting main ideas, circling unfamiliar words—making it difficult for students to know what they should be thinking about and doing when asked to annotate a text. Writing and or drawing in the margins, on the other hand, has a specific purpose and action.

How do I use it?

While students read, they should clarify, summarize, connect, and visualize textual information by either writing or drawing in the margins. Depending on the passage, a student might want to draw a concept that is being discussed or an analogy that is being used to compare one experience to another. These drawings should be small enough to fit in the margins and they should be placed near the section of text that they are illustrating. Similarly, students who choose to write in the margins should be encouraged to write their ideas directly next to the paragraph that they are responding to.

When should I use it?

Use this strategy whenever it is appropriate. When writing in the margins is not possible, use sticky notes to create a margin that can be removed once the reading is finished. Students must learn when to write and when to draw in the margins. In the beginning, you might want to select texts that do not necessitate drawing in the margins so that students can focus on developing their abilities to write in the margins. Then, select texts that are filled with descriptive and or figurative language. Use these types of texts to teach students how to draw in the margins. Eventually, you will want to purposefully select texts that are conducive to both strategies. Remember to always teach students when to use a particular strategy and discuss why one strategy is more appropriate than another.

Why should I use it?

Writing in the margins engages readers in the reading task and allows them to document their thinking while reading. Both writing in the margins and drawing in the margins engages students in actively thinking about the texts they read. The power of this strategy is not the actual act of writing and drawing in the margins; instead, it is the thinking processes that students must undergo in order to produce such ideas.

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One Page Tutorial

This table provides six strategies that help readers understand texts. While making connections, clarifying information or doing some other work defined on this page, write down your thoughts in the margins of the text, on sticky notes, or in your Cornell notes.

<p><u>Visualize</u></p> <p>Visualize what the author is saying and draw an illustration in the margin. Visualizing what authors say will help you clarify complex concepts and ideas.</p> <p>When visualizing ask,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does this look like?• How can I draw this concept/ idea?• What visual and/ or symbol best represents this idea?	<p><u>Summarize</u></p> <p>Briefly summarize paragraphs or sections of a text. Summarizing is a good way to keep track of essential information while condensing lengthier passages.</p> <p>Summaries will...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• state what the paragraph is about• describe what the author is <i>doing</i>• account for key terms and/or ideas.
<p><u>Clarify</u></p> <p>Clarify complex ideas presented in the text. Readers clarify ideas through a process of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Pausing to clarify ideas will increase your understanding of the ideas in the text.</p> <p>In order to clarify information you might...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• define key terms.• reread sections of the text.• analyze or connect ideas in the text. paraphrase or summarize ideas.	<p><u>Connect</u></p> <p>Make connections within the text, to your own life, and to the world. Making connections will improve your comprehension of the text.</p> <p>While reading you might ask,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does this relate to me?• How does this idea relate to other ideas in the text? <p>How does this relate to the world?</p>
<p><u>Respond</u></p> <p>Respond to ideas in the text as you read. Your responses can be personal or analytical in nature. Thoughtful responses will increase engagement and comprehension.</p> <p>Readers will often respond to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• interesting ideas.• emotional arguments.• provocative statements.• author's claims.• facts, data, and other support.	<p><u>Question</u></p> <p>Question both the ideas in the text and your own understanding of the text. Asking good questions while reading will help you become a more critical reader.</p> <p>While reading you might ask...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the author saying here?• What is the author doing?• What do I understand so far?• What is the purpose of this section?• What do I agree/disagree with?